

# Unwelcome intrusive thoughts (flashbacks)

Flashbacks or intrusive thoughts are not unusual, but temporary ways our bodies react to, or remember something painful or traumatic. They can last from a few seconds to a few hours. They can occur at unexpected times and regardless of how you are feeling. You can experience these memories as images, sounds, smells or something you feel.

Though this is a normal reaction to a traumatic event they can be frightening, confusing, disorienting and overwhelming. The important thing to remember is that they are temporary. They are experienced in this way as they are a reaction or memory, not a planned thought or action. They can occur time and again and they can impact on your sleep or health.

If these are unwelcome sensations, there are several techniques that may assist you to manage. This list is not exhaustive. It's best to find what works for you.

<b>Olfactory (smells)</b>	Mouth wash (eg Listerine) the strong smell of the mouth wash can overpower the olfactory memory, use of lavender spray.
<b>Auditory (sounds)</b>	Play music, call a friend, focus on a TV program, go outside and be aware of the outside noises – birds, traffic.
<b>Intrusive thoughts (these often occur when you haven't finished with the thought)</b>	Schedule time for the thoughts. Take a walk outside and notice what is there. Call a friend.
<b>Visual (images)</b>	Connect with the present moment by looking at everything around you. Identify all the colours you see. Count all the pieces of furniture around you. List off all the noises you hear. Noticing what is around you can connect you with the present moment. Stomp your feet to remind yourself where you are; Press your feet firmly into the ground. Take a warm, relaxing bubble bath or a warm shower. Feel the water touching your body; rub your palms, clap your hands. Listen to the sounds. Feel the sensation.
<b>Sensory (touch) you feel like someone is touching you but they aren't</b>	Pay attention to 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste. Cross your legs and arms. Feel the sensations of you controlling your body. If you are sitting, stand. If you are standing, sit. Pay attention to the movement change. Hold something that you find comforting. For some it may be a stuffed animal or blanket. Notice how it feels in your hands; if you have a pet, pat them and feel their fur beneath your hand. Say the pet's name out loud; talk to the deceased.

**If these experiences persist it may be helpful to speak with a health professional. For example, your doctor or a psychologist.**